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Challenges in Developing English Speaking and Listening Skills via Zoom

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the transition to online learning, particularly within English education that necessitates active oral engagement. The Zoom platform is predominantly employed for live instruction; however, its efficacy in enhancing Speaking and Listening skills has not been extensively examined. This study investigates students' experiences concerning challenges related to these skills during Zoom-based English classes. Employing a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological methodology, the research involves fifteen students from the Law Study Program at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, selected through purposive sampling. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and analysed using Thematic Analysis. The findings reveal three primary categories of challenges: technical, psychological, and pedagogical. Technical challenges encompass poor audio quality, unstable internet connections, and communication delays, which impede listening comprehension and diminish speaking confidence. Psychological barriers include anxiety and Zoom fatigue, which affect concentration, motivation, and participation. Pedagogically, Zoom renders oral interactions unnatural, breakout rooms are less effective, and lecturer feedback is limited- all of which constrain the development of oral skills. Overall, the enhancement of Speaking and Listening proficiency via Zoom hinges on technological readiness, students' emotional states, and instructional strategies. An adaptable, engaging, and student-centred approach is essential to improve oral learning efficacy within a virtual context.

Keywords: Synchronous learning, verbal skills, technical challenges, speaking anxiety, virtual interactions.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of global higher education has entered an era of extensive digital disruption, driven by rapid advancements in information technology. Academic institutions are increasingly integrating Learning Management Systems and various digital tools to facilitate teaching and learning. This transition was further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, serving as an unexpected catalyst that propelled the shift toward Distance Learning (PJJ). These rapid changes forced both lecturers and students to quickly adapt to a virtual learning environment under limited conditions (Noviarini, 2021; White, 2020).

In particular, the move to online learning in language education has introduced new challenges that demand significant methodological adjustments. According to Noviarini (2021), pandemic conditions have influenced students' attitudes toward learning, with virtual education positively impacting their enthusiasm. However, the research also identifies barriers such as device availability, internet reliability, and the ability to maintain independent focus. Mu'awanah et al. (2021) similarly highlight that while Zoom is effective for English learning during the pandemic, students face technical and emotional challenges.

In online learning (PJJ), teaching strategies are primarily categorized into asynchronous and synchronous modalities. Asynchronous learning permits students to engage independently with flexible scheduling, whereas synchronous learning involves real-time interaction, which is vital for courses that emphasize communication. For English instruction—which inherently depends on direct interaction—platforms such as Zoom are indispensable for bridging the gap between educators and learners (Marifatulloh & Fajarina, 2022; Dantes et al., 2022). Features including screen sharing, breakout rooms, polling, and virtual whiteboards facilitate the development of interactive activities focused on speaking and listening competencies.

Breakout rooms are particularly crucial for smaller group discussions that foster speaking practice. Nonetheless, research indicates that the efficacy of breakout rooms is contingent upon factors such as task design, students' preparedness, and internet connectivity (Park & Johnson, 2021; Putri & Suryaman, 2022). Although Zoom provides functionalities analogous to face-to-face interactions, the learning experiences of students remain heavily influenced by technical and psychological variables.

This investigation examines the experiences of students enrolled in the Law Study Program (S1) at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, specifically those undertaking the General Basic Courses (MKDU) in English. For non-language majors, acquiring proficiency in English, particularly oral communication skills, constitutes not only an academic objective but also a professional imperative, facilitating access to international literature and enabling students to stay abreast of developments in global legal contexts. As noted by Nguyen (2021), speaking and listening skills are the most impacted in online learning environments, given their reliance on intensive interaction, prompt responses, and a conducive environment for sustained focus.

Enhancement of speaking abilities necessitates authentic, spontaneous communication spaces in which students feel secure and confident to express themselves without undue apprehension. Conversely, listening comprehension depends on superior audio quality and stable psychological conditions to capably process auditory stimuli. Both skills, however, are highly prone to technical disruptions such as lag, delay, and sound distortion during Zoom sessions (Susilowati, 2020; Al-Jarf, 2021). These issues frequently contribute to speaking anxiety, Zoom fatigue, and diminished motivation for learning (Mundiri et al., 2021).

Prior investigations have predominantly concentrated on the general impact of Zoom on language development, particularly concerning non-language learners such as law students, who possess distinct characteristics and educational requisites. This gap highlights the necessity for nuanced, experience-driven research to elucidate how technical, psychological, and pedagogical factors influence students' oral proficiencies during synchronous online learning (Bawanti & Arifani, 2021; Mustafa et al., 2022).

Consequently, this study aims to explore and qualitatively analyze the experiences of Law students at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah related to the principal challenges encountered in developing speaking and listening skills via Zoom-based synchronous learning. The outcomes intend to provide empirical insights to inform the development of more effective, adaptable, and competency-oriented digital pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing the oral skills of non-language students within a religious university context.

METHOD

This study was conducted within the Law Study Programme (S1) at UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, focusing on students enrolled in the General Basic Course (MKDU) in English. It employs a qualitative, descriptive phenomenological methodology to thoroughly explore students' lived experiences concerning the challenges of developing Speaking and Listening skills through Zoom synchronous classes. The sample comprised 15 students from semesters 5 and 7, selected purposefully based on two criteria: (1) having participated in Zoom-based Speaking and Listening classes for at least one semester, and (2) expressing willingness to share detailed experiences through in-depth interviews. Including students from various semesters aims to capture a broader spectrum of experiences and perspectives.

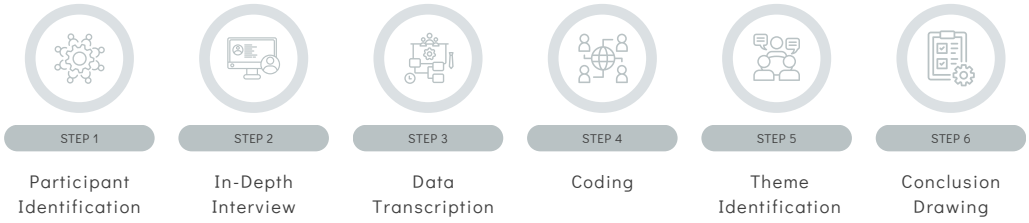


Figure 1. Qualitative Research Procedure

Data collection was executed through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted online via Zoom. The interview guidelines addressed technical aspects (audio quality, lag, connectivity), psychological aspects (speaking anxiety, Zoom fatigue), and pedagogical aspects (quality of interaction and feedback from lecturers). The research instrument comprised a series of open-ended questions enabling participants to furnish detailed narratives based on their experiences. Subsequently, the data analysis was performed utilising Braun & Clarke's Thematic Analysis framework, which encompasses six stages: data transcription, familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, and theme definition and naming. This methodological process facilitated the identification of prominent patterns and challenges faced by students concerning the development of speaking and listening skills within the context of Zoom-based learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Challenges Faced by Students in Developing Speaking Skills on Zoom

Research indicates that students' speaking proficiency is substantially influenced by technical difficulties, psychological factors, and pedagogical constraints during online learning sessions on Zoom. To comprehend the context of speaking activities in synchronous learning, the following delineates the process flow of English speaking lessons conducted via Zoom.

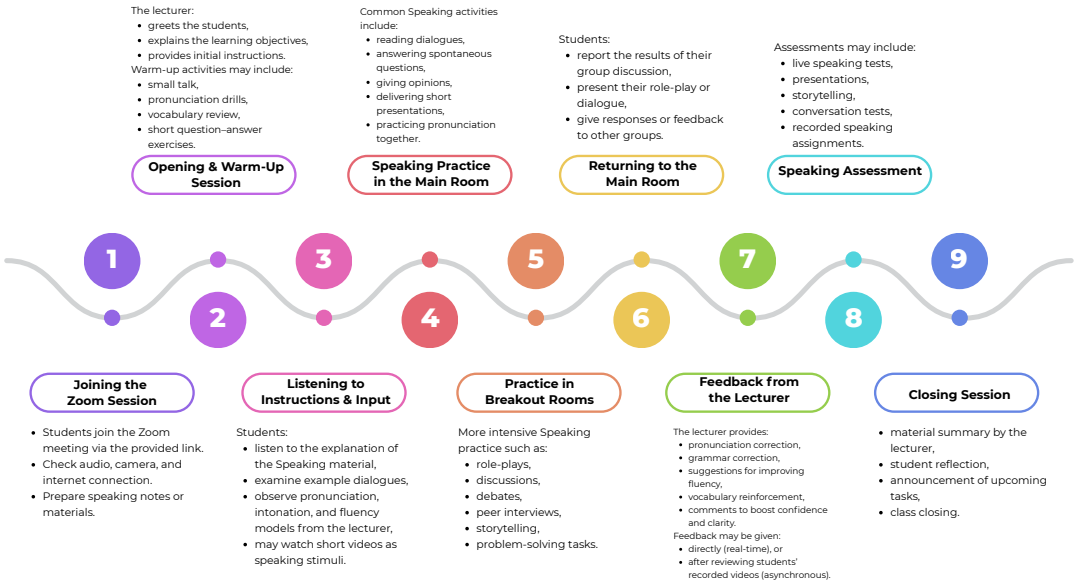


Figure 2. The Process of Learning to Speak English via Zoom

From a technical perspective, numerous students expressed reluctance to speak, citing concerns that their voices might not be heard distinctly due to unstable connections. Informant 11 stated, "*When I wanted to speak, I hesitated because I was afraid that my voice would be broken. So I prefer to remain silent*." Such concerns adversely affect their confidence and diminish students' active participation in classroom discussions. In addition to technical challenges, speaking anxiety constitutes a significant barrier to developing speaking skills. Students often feel uncomfortable when required to turn on their cameras or appear on screen without direct social interaction, which leads to feelings of being overly scrutinised. Informant 12 remarked, "*I'm more anxious to talk on Zoom than in a live class. When the camera is on, it feels like everyone is looking at me.*" Moreover, pedagogical factors, including limited feedback from lecturers, also influence the progression of speaking skills. Feedback that is abbreviated due to time constraints and technical issues prevents students from receiving comprehensive phonological and fluency corrections. Informant 3 noted, "The speaking feedback from the lecturer is not very detailed. The

explanation is often cut short due to time." These observations suggest that learning to speak via Zoom cannot fully replicate the enriching oral learning experience offered by face-to-face education.

Students' Challenges in Developing Listening Skills via Zoom

Students' listening skills in Zoom learning are influenced by a range of technical, psychological, and pedagogical challenges. Generally, students consider listening the most challenging skill when engaging in online education due to its dependence on device and network quality. The listening process in a Zoom session requires elevated concentration, continuous attention, and the capacity to rapidly process auditory information. Consequently, technical constraints and cognitive fatigue serve as primary obstacles to students' listening performance.



Figure 2. English Listening Learning Process via Zoom

Students predominantly encounter technical challenges such as unstable audio, inadequate internet connectivity, and delays, which interfere with auditory reception. Numerous students report that lecturers' voices frequently become out of sync or disjointed, resulting in missed critical information. As Informant 5 observed, "*If you listen, very often the lecturer's voice is interrupted or lagged. So I missed important information.*" This situation compels students to repeatedly seek clarification or infer meanings from context, thereby hindering comprehension. Device deficiencies exacerbate sound issues; for instance, Informant 2 stated, "I only use a laptop without a headset, so my friends' voices are not clear." Hardware limitations compromise listening effectiveness, particularly during discussions or presentations. Psychologically, 'zoom fatigue' diminishes students' listening capacity, as prolonged screen exposure leads to cognitive exhaustion. Informant 4 expressed, "*Listening is difficult when you are tired. The head feels full, so it's easy to lose information.*" Similarly, extended sessions impair concentration, as Informant 7 noted, "*If the sessions are long, I often lose focus.*" Fatigue affects both physical and mental faculties, undermining listening skills. Additional obstacles include environmental distractions at home, background noise, and suboptimal conditions, all of which make attentive listening more arduous. This situation necessitates adaptive strategies and enhanced classroom management. In essence, listening in Zoom-based learning encounters more obstacles than traditional face-to-face interactions due to technological reliance, device constraints, psychological factors, and online distractions. If unaddressed, these issues can substantially impair students' listening comprehension.

Student Experience Related to Verbal Interaction in a Zoom Virtual Room

Students perceive verbal interaction in Zoom as unnatural and often less fluid compared to face-to-face learning. Virtual spaces hinder spontaneous, rhythmic, and responsive conversations due to the lack of nonverbal cues like eye contact, gestures, and facial expressions, making it hard to gauge when to speak or respond. This absence of physical cues makes conversations feel stiff and less lively. Breakout rooms intended to foster verbal interaction often lead to passive participation, with students describing the atmosphere as quiet, awkward, and unengaged. As one student noted, "*In the breakout room, it is often just silent. No one started talking.*" This suggests a need for clearer prompts, task structures, or role guidance to encourage productive communication. Factors like discomfort, speech anxiety, and social uncertainty contribute to the lack of spontaneity. Technical delays further disrupt conversation flow, causing overlaps and confusion, as one student mentioned, "*It feels like an unnatural interaction. There were delays, so we often talked together or were confused about who should answer."* These delays not only hinder effective communication but also diminish students' confidence, especially those already anxious about speaking online. Additionally, teachers face challenges in monitoring students' gestures and expressions due to limited platform capabilities, leading to incomplete feedback and slower skill development. Overall, students' experiences reveal that verbal interactions in Zoom face multidimensional barriers—technical, emotional, social, and pedagogical—that make online speech different from face-to-face learning. This calls for more adaptive strategies to support meaningful oral communication in online settings.

Discussion

This study reveals that developing Speaking and Listening skills through Zoom-based learning presents complex challenges, including technical, psychological, and pedagogical factors. These challenges interact and significantly impact the effectiveness of language learning. The findings align with previous research indicating that online learning during the pandemic altered communication and student participation in virtual classes (Noviarini, 2021). For non-language students like Law students—focused on here—limitations in digital infrastructure and readiness for independent learning also influence their experience during synchronous sessions.

Technically, issues such as poor audio quality, network disruptions, and delays hinder listening comprehension and limit speaking practice opportunities. These results support research suggesting that listening is especially vulnerable to online disruptions because it depends heavily on clear auditory input (Susilowati, 2020). Such technical problems not only impair understanding but also reduce students' confidence in speaking.

Psychological challenges, including speaking anxiety and Zoom fatigue, are also significant. College students reported feeling more anxious with cameras on and had difficulty concentrating during long listening tasks. These issues are corroborated by studies showing that students often experience discomfort and emotional distress when engaging in Zoom speaking activities (Putri & Suryaman, 2022). Affective factors like these notably decrease verbal participation.

Pedagogically, the study observed that verbal interactions in breakout rooms tend to be passive and unproductive. Although designed for communication practice, breakout rooms are underutilised because students wait for others to initiate conversations and often feel awkward starting dialogues. This indicates that synchronous learning requires more structured tasks and clearer instructions to foster engagement. Additionally, teachers' limited ability to provide detailed Speaking feedback—due to technical and visual constraints—further hampers skill development.

Overall, the findings confirm that the success of developing Speaking and Listening skills via Zoom depends heavily on technological readiness, students' psychological well-being, and effective pedagogical strategies. These results reinforce existing literature, showing that online language learning requires a holistic approach that addresses technology use, learning comfort, and interaction quality. Therefore, innovative pedagogical methods should be developed to overcome technical barriers, alleviate student anxiety, and offer more effective feedback.

CONCLUSION

This research aims to thoroughly investigate students' experiences in developing English speaking and listening skills through synchronous learning via Zoom. The findings indicate that students' verbal proficiencies are influenced by three primary categories of challenges: technical, psychological, and pedagogical. In the technical realm, issues such as suboptimal audio quality, network instability, and communication delays impede seamless listening and undermine students' confidence in speaking. Psychologically, speaking anxiety and digital fatigue, commonly known as Zoom fatigue, are shown to diminish students' focus, motivation, and engagement. Pedagogically, it was observed that oral interactions on Zoom frequently appear unnatural, lack spontaneity, and are less effective for facilitating communication exercises, primarily due to limited lecturer feedback resulting from technical limitations. Overall, this study affirms that the development of speaking and listening skills via Zoom necessitates an approach that is both flexible and attentive to students' needs. The success of online education relies not only on technological resources but also on pedagogical strategies capable of overcoming technical barriers, alleviating learning anxiety, and fostering secure, interactive communication spaces. Consequently, an innovative and supportive instructional design is imperative for enabling students to effectively enhance their oral skills in a virtu

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